

GAYĀ-MĀHĀTMYA AS DEPICTED IN

SKANDA-PURĀṆA V, I, 57-59

Literature on Gayā is very large in extent¹ and this is obvious because of the high sacredness of this place which is considered the most suitable *tīrtha* to perform *śrāddha* ceremony and one among the holiest places of India². Its *māhātmya*-s are quoted

1. Compare the bibliography quoted in KANE, pp. 643-644. See also L. P. VIDYARTHI, *The Sacred complex in Hindu Gaya*, Delhi, 1978², mainly dealing with a social and historical analysis of the Gayawal-s of Gayā; ID., *Cultural Personality of the Gayawal*, in «Journal of Social Research», 12, 2 (Sept. 1970), pp. 1-19. An unsurpassed study of Gayā in the History and Literature of India in made by C. Jacques: see the *Introduction* to the G.M., pp. vi-lxvi; compare also the bibliography at pp. 426-427. Moreover it deserves to be quoted B. BARUA, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā*, Calcutta, 1931 and 1934, 2 vols., analysed and criticized by KANE, pp. 644-645, 647-651. For geographical data, compare D. C. SIRCAR, *Studies in the geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1971², ch. xxi, pp. 282-288; B. C. LAW, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, Paris, 1954; first Indian edition: New Delhi, 1984, p. 219.

2. The sacredness of Gayā chiefly derives from three factors: i) the sacred city is the actual body of the *asura* Gayā (and from this point of view it is an *asura-tīrtha*: see *infra*, fn. 32): for the illustration of this myth cf. *infra*; ii) it is one of the *śākta pīṭha*-s; compare *Devībhāgavata-purāṇa*, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, Bombay, 1909, VII, 30, 64b. As regards the various traditions and lists of *śākta-pīṭha*-s, see D. C. SIRCAR, *The Śakta Pīṭhas*, Delhi, 1973²: part. p. 68, v. 9, fn. 5 for the quotation of Gayā; cf. also P. G. LALYE, *Studies in Devī Bhāgavata*, Bombay, 1973, p. 354; iii) it is the *pitṛ-tīrtha par excellence*: see TVK, pp. lxxxiii-lxxxvi; p. 163: *pitṛtīrtham gayā nāma sarvatīrthavarām śubham* / [the same in MP(V) 22, 4a]. With regard to the performance of the *śrāddha* in it, strictly connected with its being a *pitṛ-tīrtha*, it is told: «*gayāyāmakṣayaṇī śrāddham japahomatapāṇsi ca* /

in the *Mahābhārata*³ and almost all *Purāṇa*-s, while the medieval digests devote various sections to it⁴. Its antiquity is incontrovertible and its existence is attested since the VI century b.C.⁵. Among the numerous eulogies of Gayā, the *Gayā-māhātmya* of the *Skanda-purāṇa*⁶ holds a particular importance. It moves — literally — Gayā from its traditional geographical collocation, the Magadha, to another one, diametrically opposed, namely the Avanti. The holy place is located there in the city of Avantī (present Ujjain), within the Mahākāla forest. This process often

pitṛkṣayo hi tatpunyaṃ tasmāttatrākṣayaṃ bhavet » (cf. TS, p. 341; the same verse (reading *kṣaye...putra...smṛtam* instead of **kṣayo...punyaṃ...bhavet*) is in BP 2.3.19.13); the rules about *gayāśrāddha* are especially described in TS, pp. 339-352; see also KANE, pp. 364-365, 391, 404-406. As for *tīrtha-śrāddha*, cf. *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities, The Sāmānya-praghaṭṭaka* of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's *Tristhalīsetu*, critically edited and translated by R. SALOMON, Delhi, 1985, vv. 368-624.

3. Cf. *Mbh*, III, 95 (*gayayajñakathane*) and VII, 66, both dealing with the great sacrifice performed by king Gaya on the banks of the *tīrtha* Brahmasaras; other *tīrtha*-s belonging to Gayā are quoted — such as the hill *Gayaśiras*, the river *Mahānadī* (*ibid.*, III, 95, 9b), the *akṣayavaṭa* (*ibid.*, III, 95, 14a) — while the very name of the holy city is not mentioned. Chapter 84 (*ibid.*) eulogizes the holy spots in Gayā to a great extent: compare KANE, pp. 647-648. Gayā in the *Mahābhārata* is thoroughly examined by Jacques in *GM*, pp. xxx-xxxvi; see also KANE, pp. 652-653.

4. Cf. *VāP(V) II (uttarārddha)*, 43-50; *SkP* 57-59; *PP(Ā) I*, 38, 2-22; *NāP II*, 44-47; *GP I*, 82-86; *AP* 114-116; *TVK*, pp. 163-174; *TS*, pp. 316-379; *TC*, pp. 268-338; etc. These *māhātmya*-s are analysed and compared in *GM*, pp. xxxviii-lix; the Author also examines the quotations of Gayā in the *Samhitā*-s, the *Veda*-s, the *Nirukta*-s, in Kalhaṇa's *Rājataranṅgiṇī* and in various inscriptions, *Ibid.*, pp. lii-lix; see also KANE, pp. 645-47 (pp. 653-654 refer to Gayā in the *smṛti*-s).

5. The oldest literary source quoting Gayā, and more exactly two important *vedī*-s belonging to it, viz. Viṣṇupada and *Gayaśiras* is Yāska's *Nirukta* 12, 19 *ad Rgveda*, I, 22, 17: see KANE, p. 645 and notes; *GM*, p. liii; for the problems connected with the interpretation of « *samārohaṇe viṣṇupade gayaśīrasītya* » (*Nirukta* 12,19) as the three holy spots of Gayā (*samārohaṇa* being intended as *udayagiri*) cf. *ibid.*, pp. liii-iv and notes. Yāska's *Nirukta* is dated between 700-500 b.C. by WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Delhi, 1981, vol. I, p. 62 and note, cf. O. BORTO, *Letterature antiche dell'India*, in *Storia delle letterature d'Oriente*, Milano, 1969, vol. III, p. 43: so, as early as vi-v century B.C., Gayā was known; moreover the Buddhist tradition affirms that Buddha went to Gayā and stayed there in various occasion (compare KANE, p. 646) and this is another proof of the antiquity of this city.

6. Cf. *SkP* 57 (*gayātīrthamāhātmye gayātīrthaprasaṃśavarṇana*, consisting of 35 verses), 58 (*gayāmāhātmye śrāddhavidhivarṇana*, of 59 verses), 59 (*gayātīrthamāhātmyavarṇana*, of 42 verses).

happens in the eulogy of holy places, usually to confirm the superiority of the extolled *tīrtha* over the other ones: for example, it is told that all *tīrtha*-s are in Gayā⁷ — and the same is related about Prayāga⁸, Avantī⁹, etc. —, that the Gaṅga goes to the Cyavanāśrama for getting rid of the sins she took on¹⁰, and so on. In this very case, however, it is stated that Avantī is the originary place of Gayā¹¹. This fact seems to testify a principal characteristic of the Indian thought: the capability to see the Whole in everything, the tension to a constant comparison between microand macrocosm. Each *kṣetra* is — as it were — a representation of the universe, a sort of *maṇḍala*¹², in which all holy places are present actually.

7. Cf. VāP (Ā) 107, 45: *tīrthānyapi ca sarvāṇi nakṣatra-pramukhās-tathā / tiṣṭhantu devāḥ sakalā devyaśca munayas-tathā* (scil. *śilāyām*, one among the most important *tīrtha*-s in Gayā). Moreover, it is told that Benares, Prayāga, Puruṣottama and Gaṅgāsāgara dwell on the banks of the Phalgu (the holy river which passes through Gayā): *vārāṇasī prayāgaśca puruṣottama-saṃjñā-kam // gaṅgāsāgara-saṃjñā-ca nityaṃ tiṣṭhatu phalguni* / (VāP(V) II, 45, 50b-51a: this verse does not appear in the corresponding chapter (viz. 107) of the VāP(Ā).

8. PP(V), III, 43, 24: *daśatīrtha-sahasrāṇiṣaṣṭikoṭyas-tathā-aparāś / yeśāṃ-sānnidhyam-atraiva-kīrtanāt-kurunandana* // (compare PP(Ā) I, 43, 23).

9. Cf. SKP 39, 2-3: *kati santy-atra tīrthāni līṅgāni ca... // sanatkumāra uvāca // ṣaṣṭikoṭisahasrāṇi ṣaṣṭikoṭīśatāni ca // mahākālavane* (scil. *avan-tyām*) *vyāsa līṅgasamkṣhā na vidhyate* //. In SkP 42, 18-22, it is pointed out that in the city of Avantī Śaṅkara, the Ganges with its *tīrtha*-s, the *Veda*-s etc. are safe, when all existing things perish at the end of the *kalpa*. About the imperishableness of Prayāga, see PP(Ā) I, 48, 4; cf. MP(Ā) 111, 4 for a clearer *lectio*.

10. Cf. SkP 54, 4-23: after the Gaṅgā was purified in the Añjanī āśrama, this place was known as Nilagaṅgā-tīrtha.

11. Cf. SkP 59, 10: *evam vyāsa gayātīrthaṃ purā-avantyāṃpratiṣṭhitam // paścāt-tu kaikaṭe jātaṃ yātrā saṃnihito'suraḥ* //. See also *infra*.

12. Structures and aims of the *maṇḍala* are complex: in brief, it is a holy and mystical diagram, a circle delimiting a consecrated area; «it is the whole universe in its essential scheme» (cf. G. Tucci, *Teoria e pratica del mandala*, Roma, 1969, p. 37). The *maṇḍala* symbolism regulates the construction of the Hindū temple. Also sacred places develop according to the structure of the *maṇḍala*: see for instance the Mahākāla forest which has four gates, each of them kept by an *Īśvara*: in its centre there is the *līṅga* of Mahākāla and the pilgrimage to these deities has to follow strictly various rules (Cf. SkP 26, 1-25); as regards the holy city of Benares interpreted as a *maṇḍala*, see D. Eck, *Banaras city of light*, London, 1983, pp. 146-147; id., *Darśan, Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Chambersburg, 1985, pp. 73-75. From this point of view, the holy place transcends its earthly reality, be-

Before going on the analysis any further, it can be useful to show briefly the origin of Gayā and the myth connected with it as depicted by the *Gayā-māhātmya* of the *Vāyu-purāṇa*¹³ which is likely to be source of many verses which are in the same *māhātmya* of the *Skanda-purāṇa*¹⁴.

The first chapter deals with the summary of the principal themes of the *māhātmya* and with the *śrāddha*. The next one describes the myth of the *asura* Gaya, who performed a *tapas* so effective that Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva went to offer him a boon: the *asura* asked them to make his own body pure so that all living beings could be set free by its *darśana*. So it happened, and the result was the emptiness of the three worlds. All gods, headed by Yama, went to Viṣṇu and complained about this; so Viṣṇu told Brahmā to celebrate a great sacrifice on the body of the *asura*, but when the God — after the consent of the Demon — was about to perform the *yajña*, the body of the *asura* began to tremble. To make him steady, Brahmā asked Dharma to give him the Śilā (rock) which was in the abode of Yama; it was put on the head of the *asura*, but without any result. Finally Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Vināyaka, Sūrya, Lakṣmī, Gaurī, Gāyatrī and Sarasvatī sat on the Śilā in their various forms and so Gaya was rendered firm. Lastly the Demon asked another boon, *i.e.* the territory which he lies on, will be renowned as Gayā and all *tīrtha-s* will be there¹⁵ and people who shall go to Gayā, shall be cleansed; and so it was. Then, at the end of the sacrifice, Brahmā gave the holy place to the *brāhmaṇa-s* who helped him

coming a boundless microcosm which has all the other *tīrtha-s* in it and, in the same time, represents all *tīrtha-s*.

13. For the contents of the eight chapters of the *Gayā-māhātmya* see also KANE, pp. 654-667; *GM*, pp. xxviii-xxx; relevant passages from chs. 105-106 of the *VāP(Ā)* are quoted in L. P. VIDYARTHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-117.

14. Compare *infra*, fn. 17-19, 24.

15. Cf. *GM* II, sl. 57 (corresponding to *VāP(Ā)* 106, 65 and *VāP(V)* II, 44, 65): *pañcakrośaṇ gayākṣetraṇ krośamekaṇ gayāśīras / tanmadhye sarva-tīrthāṇi prayacchantu hitam nṛṇām //*. This statement is an interesting verification of the facts examined previously (cf. fn. 12): Gayā indeed, in its very centre, has all the holy places: the devotee entering its *maṇḍala* performs the *tīrthayātrā* of all Indian *tīrtha-s*, as well.

during the sacrifice, with the clause that they would have never asked any fee for the sacrifices. Later on, king Dharma performed a *yajña* and the *brāhmaṇa*-s accepted the fees due to them: because of this, they were cursed. The God took away the wealth that he gave them before. However, for their repentance, he allowed them to live on the incomes of the *tīrtha*. All the third *adhyāya* and the first part of the fourth one deal with the myth of the origin of Śilā; then it is described the pilgrimage to Śilā. The fifth chapter illustrates the origin of the club (*gadā*) of Viṣṇu and the myth of the *asura* Heti, killed by this club. Then it is exposed the list of mountains and rivers in Gayā, which are the invisible forms of Viṣṇu; the list of the *pada*-s (footprints) of the God, i.e. his manifest and immanifest form, and lastly the enumeration of his statues, his visible forms. In the following chapter it is described how to perform the *śrāddha* in Gayā, and when. It is quoted a long *mantra* dealing with the various ancestors to whom *piṇḍa*-s have to be offered, which is recited during the ceremony. The seventh chapter deals with the pilgrimage in Gayā, the various *tīrtha*-s which are in it and the myths connected with them. The eighth and last *adhyāya* describes the order in which the pilgrim has to visit and honour the various *tīrtha*-s of Gayā¹⁶.

So the myth firmly anchors Gayākṣetra to Gayāsura and, indeed, it is the actual body of the *asura*, well established in the

16. They are quoted as follows (according to GM VIII, i.e. VāP(V) II, 50, VāP(Ā) 112:): Gāyatrī (v. 21); Sāvitrī (v. 22); Sarasvatī (v. 23); Viśāla, Leliḥāna, Bharatāśrama, Muṇḍapṛṣṭha, Gadādhara (v. 24); Ākāśagaṅgā, Gīrīkarṇamukha (see fn. 3 of v. 25); Vaitaraṇī (v. 26); Godāvārī, Yamunā, Devanadī, Gopracāra (v. 30); Puṣkariṇī, Ghṛtakulyā, Madhukulyā, Koṭītīrtha, Rukmiṇī (v. 31); Mārkaṇḍeyaśa, Koṭīśa (*liṅga*-s) (v. 31); Pāṇḍuśilā (v. 39); Madhuśravā (where Ghṛtakulyā, Madhukulyā, Devikā and Mahānadī join together, near Pāṇḍuśilā: see fn. 1 *ad* v. 43); Daśāśvamedha, Haṃsa (v. 46); Mataṅga (v. 47); Makha (v. 48); a *saṅgama* where is Tarakeśvara, Gayākūpa (v. 49); Bhasmakūṭa, Dhautapāda, Rāma-puṣkariṇī (v. 50); Suṣumnā, Mahākulyā (cf. fn. 3 *ad* v. 51), Vasiṣṭheśa; Dhenukāraṇya, Kāmādhenu-pada (v. 54); Kardamāla (v. 55); lastly in v. 56 the six "gayā-s" granting *mokṣa* are quoted: Gayāgaja (a statue of Gaṇeśa), Gayāditya, Gāyatrī, Gadādhara, Gayā and Gayāśīras; this is being a mere list, we have quoted the holy places only the first time they have been quoted. G. Jacques has tried to find the present collocation of these holy places: see GM, footnotes *ad* VIII, 21-56.

district inhabited by the Kīkaṭa people¹⁷. Opposite to this tradition, the *Gayā-māhātmya*, within the *Avantīkṣetramāhātmya* of the *Skanda-purāṇa*, begins with this question: « why Gayā, which lies, together with its holy spots, in the Kīkaṭa region, is placed in Avantī (*purī*)? »¹⁸. From this question, which marks the entire *māhātmya* and is the focus of its originality, the myth proceeds. As an answer to the above-mentioned interrogation, Sanatkumāra relates that in the *kṛtayuga* the wise and pious king Yūgādideva lived, whose realm was happy and prosperous (vv. 5-16). While he was performing ten million sacrifices in the city of Avantī, the *dānava* Tuhūṇḍa could rule over the world, because of the boon he obtained from Brahmā, after having performed a tremendous *tapas* (v. 17). *Dharma* faded away, sacrifices were no more performed, everywhere sin grew more and more (vv. 19-20). The gods, together with the *pitṛ*-s, the *sādhu*-s, etc., went to Brahmā for protection; they, headed by him, reached Viṣṇu and honoured him by reciting the *Puruṣasūkta* hymn. Then the disembodied voice of the God told them to go to the Mahākāla forest (in the city of Avantī) where is the holy Gayā with its *tīrtha*-s (vv. 22-35). The following *adhyāya* is fully devoted to the description of the basic importance of the *śrāddha* (v. 5: *śrāddhe prakalpita lokāḥ śrāddhe dharmāḥ pratiṣṭhitaḥ / śrāddhe yajñā hi tiṣṭhanti sarva-karma-phala-pradāḥ* //): it describes the sevenfold partition of the *pitṛ*-s (vv. 13-25), and quotes the long list of ancestors for whose salvation it is convenient to perform *śrāddha* (vv. 39b-58)¹⁹. The

17. Cf. GM IV, 55: *kikaṭesu gayā puṇya puṇyaṃ rājagṛhaṃ vanam / cyavanasyāśramāḥ puṇyo nadi puṇyā punaḥpunā* // For a similar verse, rearranged in an almost opposite context, see *infra*, fn. 18.

18. Cf. SkP 57, vv. 3-4a: *kikaṭesu gayā puṇyā nadi puṇyā punaḥpunā / cyavanasyāśramāḥ puṇyaḥ puṇyo rājagiris-tathā* // *sa katham vidito deśe mahākālavāne śubhe* /. Note that Mahākālavāna, abode of the homonymous Śiva, is the most important *tīrtha* in the holy city of Avantī. It is *maṇḍala*-shaped, and the abode of a very high number of *tīrtha*-s (compare SkP 23, 26, 39, etc., cf. *supra* fn. 12). Avantī, abode of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā (see SkP 40) has a remarkable holiness, all the same.

19. Many verses of this part of the chapter devoted to the *pitṛ-śrāddha* are taken from the VāP(V) II, 11 (namely *śrāddhakalpa*: note that this chapter is almost identical to BP 2.3.10), corresponding to VāP(Ā) 72-73, and VāP(V) II, 48 corresponding to VāP(Ā) 110; GM 6. It is obvious that the *Gayā-māhātmya* of the SkP is a late arrangement of the usual redaction of

importance of the offerings to *pitṛ-s* is stressed by the brief myth of Bharadvāja's sons who, after killing their *guru's* cow, out of hunger ate it: but they devoted the wicked meal to the *pitṛ-s* — *pitṛṇ uddiśya* — and just for the sacred power of this deed, practically a *śrāddha*, they could remember their previous births and be purified of their sin (vv. 28-31). The third and last *adhyāya* of this *māhātmya*, together with the last verse of ch. 58, connects itself with the first one directly. The gods followed Viṣṇu's advice and went to Gayā in the Mahākālā wood within the city of Avantī where they performed the prescribed rites: because of this, they were restored to their previous rank²⁰. After maintaining that « Gayātīrtha is well settled in Kumudvatī »²¹, and describing Gayā's *tīrtha-s*²², the text confirms that this holy city was established in Avantī at first; only then it arose where Gayāsura

this *māhātmya*, probably from the *Vāyu-purāṇa*, in order to render it suitable for the new context, i.e. the eulogy of Avantī: see for instance how the statement of *Vāyu-p'*: Gayā is in the Kikaṭa region, was modified in *SkP* adding *sa kathaṃ vidito deśe mahākālavane śubhe* to it (see *supra* footnotes 17 and 18). According to the new scheme, as regards *pitṛ-s* and *śrāddha* only the most significant verses are quoted, such as the well-known "ete pitaro devā devāśca pitaras-tathā // anyonyaṃ pitaro hyete devāḥ..." / (*SkP* 58, 10b-11a), without any further explanation and description, while this subject is analysed at length in *VāP(V)* II, 11, and also in *GP* I, 89, namely "rucikṛta-pitṛstotra". For the concordances between *SkP* 58 and *VāP(V)* II, 10; 11 and 48, see Appendix I.

20. *SkP* 58, 59cd, and 59, 1: *gayāyāṃ ca samāsādya surā indrapurogamāḥ / cakruś-ca vidhivat-sarve yad-uktaṃ devabhāṣayā // 59 // tataḥ suraganāḥ sarve dhūtapāpāḥ samāhitāḥ / punar-yogabalaṃ prāpya svādhikāraṃ yayuḥ purā // 1 //*.

21. Cf. *Ibid.*, v. 2a: *evaṃ vyāsa gayātīrthaṃ kumudvatyaṃ suniścitam*. Kumudvatī is another name of the sacred city of Avantī; properly the sixth out of the seven existences of Avantī; cf. *ibid.*, ch. 45. In the list in ch. 36 this name does not appear and Cūḍāmaṇi is quoted.

22. Cf. *Ibid.*, 59, 47: *phalguś-ca saritāṃ śreṣṭhā tathaiva phaladāyini / ādigayā buddhagayā tathā viṣṇupadī smṛtā // gayākoṣṭhas-tathā prokto gadādhara-padāni ca / vedikā ṣoḍaśi proktā tathaiva ca-akṣayo vataḥ // pre-tamuktikārī nityaṃ śilā caktā tathaiva ca / acchodā nimnagā proktā pitṛnāṃ cāśramottamaḥ // devānāṃ dānavānāṃ ca ya yakṣa-kinnara-rakṣasāṃ / pannagānāṃ ca sarveśāṃ tathaiva-āśrama uttamaḥ //*. Note that Gayākoṣṭha and the river Acchodā are not quoted in the similar list quoted *Ibid.*, 57, 29-32. The Acchodā is told to be the daughter of the *pitṛ-s* called Barhiṣad, in *BP* 2, 3, 10, 53b-54. As regards the quotation of *Buddhagayā*, it is a proof of the late redaction of this eulogy: the use of this term seems to be recorded only in works concerning Buddhism, written by Europeans: com-

was placed²³. Then the extension of Gayā²⁴ and the basic importance of *śrāddha* are stated, together with the most propitious moments for its performance (vv. 13b-16).

A reference to the myth of skanda's birth through the six *mātrkā*-s is then made: the wives of the *Ṛṣi*-s (except Arundhatī²⁵), repudiated by their husbands, were roaming from forest to forest, when they met Nārada. At his request, they related him their trouble: they were accused to be unfaithful by their husbands and to have had a love affair with Agni Pāvaka²⁶. Nārada told them to go to the holy forest Mahākāla where is

pare the discussion in GM, p. xli; the absence of *Gayāśiras* in this list offers another proof of this fact (cf. *Ibid.*, p. xli).

23. Cf. SkP 59, 10-11: *evam vyāsa gayātīrthaṃ purāvantyāṃ pratiṣṭhitam / paścattu kaikaṭe jātaṃ yatra saṃnīhito'suraḥ // 10 // tadārabhya dvijaśreṣṭhā gayā tatra pratiṣṭhitā / gadādhara-pada-ghātair-mahāsuro nipātitaḥ //*

24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 59, 13a: *pañcakrośaṃ gayākṣetraṃ krośamekaṃ gayāśiraḥ /*. This is a wide-spread statement (compare VāP(V) II, 44, 65a; GP I, 82, 11a: only the first *pāda*; I, 83, 3a; AP 115, 42b; etc.) which describes the extension of Gayā. *Gayāśiras* is recorded only in this half *śloka* in the *Gayā-Māhātmya* of the SkP and probably this *tīrtha* had no more importance when this eulogy was compiled (compare GM, p. xli): the half verse was used as a stereotyped expression to indicate the whole extension of Gayā where *karīṣyāmi piṭṛnām dattam-aṅṣayam* (SkP 59, 13b). Anyway the quotation is important because shows that Gayā in Avantī still has its own extension, beyond all its *tīrtha*-s: so, according to the religious point of view, the two holy places besides co-existing, are co-extensive — as it were (the Mahākāla-*vana* is told to have the perimeter of one *yojana*: see SkP 26, 3a).

25. SkP 59, does not quote the absence of Arundhatī explicitly; SkP 34, relates at length the myth of the birth of Skanda (see *infra*, fn. 26) and speaks about the six wives of the seven *ṛṣi*-s (v. 62a); finally, Mbh III, 226, 8, states: *atha saptarṣayaḥ srutvā jātaṃ putraṃ mahaujasam / tat-tyajuhḥ śaṭ-tadā patnīr-vinā devīm arundhatīm //*

26. Briefly, the well known myth of the birth of Skanda runs as follows (in SkP 34): Śiva and Pārvatī, after the marriage, go to their abode and there dally together, so a long time and so passionately that the universe is troubled. Then the gods send Agni to the divine couple to stop it, but Śiva throws his own semen in mouth of Agni, who is not able to bear its heat and rejects it into the Gaṅgā, but also the river is unable to endure it, and casts it ashore, where the semen blazes like fire. The six *mātrkā*-s, chilled because of the bath into the Gaṅgā, seeing the flames, and thinking it were fire, go there and so the semen penetrates into them: thus Skanda was originated. Anyway here SkP, quoting Agni Pāvaka, refers to the more common form of this myth, where Svāhā, disguised as the seven *ṛṣi*-s' wives, seduces Agni (cf. W.D. O'FLAHERTY, *Hindu Myths*, Harmondsworth, 1976 [reprint], pp. 109-110 and notes).

Gayā and the immortal *nyagrodha*: the mere going to this holy place gets rid of all sins. The six *mātṛkā*-s followed Nārada's advice and went to the sacred spot where they performed the prescribed rites during the *pañcamī* of the bright half of month Bhādra. Because of these pious acts, they were accepted again by their husbands. For this reason, from then on, this *pañcamī* was called *ṛṣipañcamī*²⁷. The *adhyāya* ends with the *phala* of the *māhātmya*: whosoever performs the prescribed rites in this period, is free from difficulties, calamities, etc.

Strangely enough, to the first question which opens the *Māhātmya*²⁸, it does not follow a myth dealing with the anomalous origin of Gayā but, as an answer, it is told a story which eulogizes the sacred power of this holy place. The actual description of Gayātīrtha and its holy places is strictly bound to the fact that they all are in the Mahākāla forest²⁹, not according to the usual praxis of the puranic eulogies, but *ab antiquo*. Only successively, because of the episode of Gayāsura struck down by Viṣṇu Gadādhara³⁰, in the region of Kīkaṭa, Gayā was originated there. Probably, this is why there is no answer to the first question of Vyāsa: Gayā exists since there is the city of Avantī; its story is the same of that of the holy city.

As regards this subject, there are various classifications of *tīrtha*-s³¹; the most common among them is the fourfold partition

27. Cf. *SkP* 59, 19-36a.

28. Cf. *supra*, fn. 18.

29. Note that this link is emphasized by the position which the two lists have in the *māhātmya*. The first one (ch. 57, vv. 29-32) is directly preceded by a brief eulogy of Mahākāla-*vana*, its *tīrtha*-s and the deities within it (vv. 26-28); the second one (ch. 59, vv. 2b-7) is preceded by the statement that Gayā is in Avantī (v. 2a; compare fn. 21) and followed by the same affirmation (v. 10a: see fn. 23).

30. *SkP* 59, 11: *tadārabhya dvijaśreṣṭha gayā tatra pratiṣṭhitā / gadādhara-pada-āghātair-mahāsuro nipātitaḥ* //. Usually the *asura* lies down of his own will, then Viṣṇu, in its three forms, together with Brahmā, etc., sits on him to make him steady (cf. *VāP(V)* II, 44).

31. Cf. the partition between *bhauma-tīrtha*-s and *mānasa-tīrtha*-s: the formers are the holy places on the earth, worshipped with the pilgrimage, etc., the latters are mental holy places, i.e. virtues like truthfulness, forbearance, etc.: without these qualities, the ablution in the *bhauma-tīrtha*-s, the pilgrimage etc., are useless (compare *SkP*, *Kāśi-khaṇḍa*, 6, 28-45; see KANE, pp. 563-564). Among *bhauma-tīrtha*-s, Gayā is considered a *pīṭh-tīrtha* (see *supra*, fn. 2).

of *tīrtha*-s in *ārṣa*, *āśura*, *mānuṣa*, and *daiva*³²; it could be supported by a division which considers their reciprocal relation: 1) *tīrtha*-s and *kṣetra*-s known in their original collocation (such as Prayāga, Gayā, Kāśī, Avantī, etc.); 2) *tīrtha*-s which are only in other holy places (such as Kambalāśvatarau Nāgau in Prayāga³³, Pretaśilā in Gayā³⁴, Mahākālavana in Avantī³⁵, etc.); 3) *tīrtha*-s which are eulogized within a certain holy place, even if they are known to be elsewhere (such as Devaprayāga, Koṭitīrtha in the Mahākāla forest)³⁶.

Now let us examine chapter 58 of the *Avantīkṣetramāhātmya* at a greater extent: *śrāddha* has a basic rôle in the pre-eminence of Gayā among the *tīrtha*-s³⁷ and properly the central chapter of the *Gayā-māhātmya* of the *Avantīkṣetramāhātmya* deals with this rite. The *adhyāya* can be divided into two parts: a first one dealing with *pitr*-s and a second one illustrating the performance of *śrāddha*. *Pitr*-s can be with form and without it³⁸. Ancestors having a form are of four types, while those formless are threefold: the latter are sons of Virāja Prajāpati, and are called Vairāja (vv. 14-17a). Then an eulogy of *yoga* and of the performance of *śrāddha* follows³⁹.

32. Cf. *Brahma-purāṇa*, 70, 16-19, as quoted in KANE, p. 567 and notes.

33. Cf. *PP(V)*, *Svarga-khaṇḍa*, 41, 4b; 43, 28a.

34. Cf. *GM* IV, 14c; VI, 17a, 62a.

35. Cf. *SkP* 5, 5 *passim*.

36. Cf. *Ibid.*, 68, 1: it is actually the confluence of the river Alakanandā with the Bhāgirathī (cf. KANE, pp. 731-732); Kotitīrtha, in its turn — quoted in the Mahākāla-vana, in Avantī, *SkP* 22, 7 *passim* — is placed in Gayā (*GM* VIII, 31), in Prayāga (cf. *PP(V)*, *Svarga-khaṇḍa*, 43, 44), etc.: see KANE, p. 770.

37. See *supra*, fn. 2, 3rd paragraph. Also compare KANE, pp. 663-679; *GM*, pp. vii-xx; L. P. VIDYARTHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-49.

38. Moreover three categories of *pitr*-s are quoted: viz. Somapa (*SkP* 58, 21b), Agniṣvāta (*ibid.*, v. 23), Barhiṣad (*ibid.*, v. 24a). At a greater extent, this argument is developed in *VāP(V)* II, 11 (similar, with slight differences and omissions to *BP* 2, 3, 10; in the *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa* translated and annotated by G. V. TAGARE, Ancient Indian Tradition & Mythology Series, vol. 23, Delhi, 1983, p. 503, a list of the seven classes of *pitr*-s together with their mental daughters is shown): for textual concordances with the *SkP* V, 1, 58, see Appendix I. This subject is widely analyzed by Kane (compare KANE, pp. 340-348). As regards the various types of worships done to the *pitr*-s, see L. P. VIDYARTHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

39. These connections are well explained in *VāP(V)* II, 10, 65 and following (vide Appendix I, for textual concordances with *SkP* 58). For *gayāśrāddha*, vide *supra*, fn. 2 and 37.

(vv. 17b-21). After, it is related that Menā, wife of Himavat, was the mental daughter of these *pitṛ*-s; Mainaka was the son of Menā and Krauñca was the son of Mainaka (vv. 22-23a): but abruptly the narration stops here. In the next *śloka*-s the *pitṛ*-s called Barhiṣad, Somapa and Agniṣvāta are quoted (vv. 23b-24). After the myth of the sons of Bharadvāja (compare *supra*, p. 327), it is related a new eulogy of *śrāddha*: it is stressed once again the power of this holy rite and the various sorts of deceased are described for whom the *śrāddha* has to be performed (vv. 33-58). Opposite to the brief treatment of *Skanda*-, *Vāyu-purāṇa*⁴⁰ develops the analysis of the progeny of the *pitṛ*-s at great length. It is told that Menā had three daughters besides Mainaka: Aparṇā, Ekaparṇā and Ekapāṭalā: the first and eldest one was known as Umā; then their lives are related, together with the myth of the origin of Skanda (ch. 72). After this, the class of *pitṛ*-s called Barhiṣad are described, whose mental daughter was the river Acchodā (ch. 73 vv. 1-23)⁴¹ and the myth of the *apsaras* Adrikā is related. Successively the *pitṛ*-s Agniṣvāta are described, whose mental daughter was Pīvarī (vv. 24-33). From v. 34 to the end of the chapter they are described all other types of *pitṛ*-s having forms, viz. the Kāvya-s, the Upahūta-s, the Ājyapā-s, the Sukāla-s, together with their mental daughters, and it is stressed the importance of the *śrāddha* performed to them.

Therefore, we can see the originality of this *Gayāmāhātmya* also in *adhyāya* 58, where great emphasis is laid on *śrāddha* and only a brief hint is made for *pitṛ*-s. The insertion of new myths and the elaboration of traditional materials according to the requirements of the eulogy of Gayā and — above all — Avantī and the Mahākāla forest, have developed a brief and complex *māhātmya* which can help to understand the connexions that, sometimes, can bind the holy places between themselves.

40. Cf. *VāP*(Ā) 72-73 viz. *śrāddhakālpa*; vide *supra*, fn. 38.

41. Vv. 1-6 are omitted in *VāP*(V) II, 11.

APPENDIX I

Table of the concordances between *SkP*, 58, *VāP(V)*, II, 10; 11 and 48, *BP* 2, 3, 9-10 and *GP* I, 89.

<i>SkP</i> v. 10b-11a	= <i>VāP(V)</i> 10, v. 34 bc (reads <i>ity*</i> ... <i>pitaraśca</i> for <i>ta...pitṛgaṇaiḥ saha</i>)
v. 13	= 11, 1ab
v. 15a	= 11, 2b (reads <i>paramā gaṇāḥ</i> for <i>paramaṇ gatāḥ</i>)
v. 16a	= 11, 3b (reads <i>virajaso nāmnā</i> for <i>sanātanā nāma</i>)
v. 16b	= 11, 4a
v. 17a	= 11; 4b (omits <i>naḥ</i>)
v. 20a	= <i>BP</i> 2, 3, 10, 4b' (reads <i>yogānām</i> for <i>yoginām</i>)
v. 20b	= 2, 3, 10, 5a (reads <i>yoga*</i> for <i>soma*</i>)
v. 21a	= 2, 3, 9, 66a (reads <i>yogānām</i> for <i>yoginām</i>)
v. 22	= <i>VāP(V)</i> 11, 5 (reads <i>śubhrā</i> for <i>śreṣṭha</i>)
v. 23a	= 11, 6b (corresponds <i>ad sensum</i>)
v. 23b-24	= are developed in <i>GP</i> I, 89, 41-42
v. 40b	= <i>VāP(V)</i> 48, v. 57a
v. 41b	= 48, 39a (reads <i>*śastrahatāśca</i> for <i>*śastrairmṛtāśca</i>)
v. 42a	= 48, 38a (reads <i>dāvadāhe mṛtā ye ca siṅhavyāghrahatāśca ye / daṃṣṭribhir*</i> for <i>da(ṇ)ṣṭribhir-vyaṅgato vāpi daur-brāhmaṇye mṛtāśca ye</i>)
v. 43a	= 48, 37a (reads <i>kecin*</i> for <i>jīvā</i>)
v. 45a	= 48, 41a
v. 46a	= 48, 42a (reads <i>*pākeṣu</i> for <i>*pāke</i>)
v. 46b	= 48, 46a
v. 52	= 48, 47 (reads <i>jātyantarasaahasreṣu</i> for <i>janmāntarasahasrāṇi</i>)
v. 53	= 48, 50 (reads <i>'bāndhavā</i> for <i>'nyajanmany</i>)
v. 54	= 48, 51 (reads <i>ca ye mṛtāḥ</i> for <i>tathaiva ca</i>)
v. 55	= 48, 52a (reads <i>*dāravivarjitāḥ</i> for <i>*dārādivarjitāḥ</i>)
v. 56	= condenses 48, 52b-53a
v. 58	= 48, 40a (reads <i>araṇye vartmani vane ... tṛṣayā hatāḥ</i> for <i>tṛṣārtāḥ kṣudhitāś-caiva hāpitāś-caiva ye mṛtāḥ</i>).

Note that *VāP(V)*, II, 48, 30-55 is a *mantra* (*piṇḍapradānamantra* [cf. *GM*, p. 187]); the half verse following each description of the various kinds of deaths is: *teṣām-uddharaṇa-arthāya imaṃ piṇḍaṃ dadāmy aham*. *SkP* 58, 38-58 is not a *mantra*, and reads *atra śrāddhaṃ vidhiyate* for *imaṃ piṇḍaṃ dadāmy aham*.

1. This and the following verses are not found in *VāP(V)*, II, 48. The connections among the *śrāddha* offered by the devotees, the yogic power of the *pitṛ*-s and the development of *soma* are told in *BP* 2, 3, 9, 58 ff.

APPENDIX II

List of abbreviations:

- AP = *Agni-purāṇa*, Introduction, Texts and Textual Corrections, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1985 (Reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).
- BP = *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa*, ed. by J. L. Shastri, Delhi, 1973.
- GM = *Gayā Māhātmya*, édition critique, traduction française et introduction par Claude Jacques, Pondichéry, 1962.
- GP = *Garuḍa-purāṇa*, with Introduction, Texts and Textual Corrections and Verse-Index, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1984 (Reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).
- KANE = P. V. KANE, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. IV, Poona, 1973².
- Mbh. = *Mahābhārata*, with the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha, ed. by Kinjawadekar, New Delhi, 1979².
- MP (Ā) = *Matsya-purāṇa*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, n. 54, Poona, 1981.
- MP (V) = *Matsya-purāṇa*, ed. with Introduction and Verse Index by Pushpendra, Delhi, 1984 (Reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).
- NāP = *Bṛhannāradiya-purāṇa*, with Preface Verse-Index and Textual Corrections, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1984 (Reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).
- PP(Ā) = *Padma-purāṇa*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, n. 131, Poona, 1893-94.
- PP(V) = *Padma-purāṇa*, with Introduction, Verse-Index and Textual Corrections, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1984 (reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).
- SkP = *Skanda-purāṇa*, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed., Bombay, 1908-09, V (Āvāntīkaṇḍa) 1 (Āvāntīkṣetramāhātmya).
- TC = VĀCASPATI MIŚRA, *Tīrthacintāmaṇi*, Calcutta, 1912.
- TS = NĀRĀYAṆA BHATṬA, *Tristhalīsetu*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, n. 78, Poona, 1915.
- TVK = BHATṬA LAKṢMĪDHARA, *Kṛtyakālpataru*, vol. VIII: *Tīrthavivecana-kaṇḍa*, ed. by K.V.R. Aiyangar, Baroda, 1942.
- VāP(Ā) = *Vāyu-purāṇa*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, n. 49, Poona, 1983.
- VāP(V) = *Vāyu-purāṇa*, with Preface, Verse-Index and Textual Corrections, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1983 (Reprint of the Veṅkaṭeśvar Press ed.).